

MISTAKES WOMEN MAKE

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First Draft

Characters

Elizabeth - 15 and a half, a princess. Currently being courted by many a prince. A spoiled brat.

Charlotte - 14, a ward. Her brother is a knight in the king's army. Pure of heart.

Vera - 16, a lord's daughter, lady in waiting. Wants to be perceived as very sexually knowledgable. Broken-hearted, not that anyone knows except her.

Frances - 15, Vera's sister and Elizabeth's second lady in waiting. Is disgusted by the very idea of sex. Waiting for something.

Simone - 16, a princess. The first to marry. An even bigger spoiled brat.

Tabitha - 25, handmaiden. Works in the castle. Prefers animals to man. Funny.

Setting

Medieval Britain. Your average feudal court. Everyone speaks with various accents distinct to their class.

Notes on the Play

A “/” indicates an overlap in dialogue. Whenever a “/” appears, the following line of dialogue should begin.

The girls all love each other, even in the most horrid of moments.

This play is a comedy, but it's funny because it's all honest. The lack of knowledge, the naïveté — that's real and should be played as such.

Absence is presence. Opposition is maintenance.

“Judas Goat” by Gabrielle Bates.

Content Warnings

Vulgarity. Violence. Death. Sexual assault. Issues of consent in general.

SCENE ONE: SEX

COMPLETE BLACKOUT. UTTER SILENCE.

A WHISPER FROM ABOVE: "Mistakes Women Make."

HUGE ORCHESTRAL OVERTURE BLARES.

SUDDEN STOP.

A SHARP SPOTLIGHT ON SIMONE.

A bedroom fit for a princess, at the highest point of the castle.

SIMONE

It's in me now, and I'm shocked. I can feel it everywhere. My whole body is thick. I'm aware of everything I'm touching.

And then he starts to move.

(LIGHTS UP on the other girls, all sitting around her on the bed/floor. They are VERA, CHARLOTTE, FRANCES, and ELIZABETH. All are reacting in wildly different but visceral manners. FRANCES is weaving on her handheld loom.)

SIMONE

It hurts. Badly. I make this noise, like a-

(fake moans/grunts/mewls)

And he's making noise, too.

(more guttural moan)

And that goes on for quite a while. It starts to hurt less and feel good, I think. And then he makes the noise again and the bed is going-

(moves up and down, bed shakes/squeals)

And he keeps making the noise-

(more moaning)

And then everything's wet all over and he's rolling to the side, off me, and the thing comes out of me and so does this... residue. And then he nods off. I went to the loo and washed the- who-knows-it away. It was sticky. Very odd.

And that was it. My wedding night.

CHARLOTTE

Oh my...

FRANCES

That sounds bloody awful.

ELIZABETH

Why haven't we heard about this before?

VERA

I told you.

ELIZABETH

Oh, come off it, Vera.

VERA

What?

CHARLOTTE

We all know you're lying.

VERA

I am not!

FRANCES

Mhm.

SIMONE

Vera, if you've done this before, then what's the thingy called?

VERA

What thingy?

SIMONE

The thingy!

ELIZABETH

Were you even listening?

VERA

Of course I was listening!

FRANCES

Then what's it called?

VERA

(smugly)

A cock.

(The girls GASP.)

CHARLOTTE

Oh my God!

(Vera mutters to herself.)

SIMONE

Is it? Huh...

ELIZABETH

Christ.

(Vera mutters again.)

FRANCES

Where'd you hear that?

VERA

I didn't hear it, Franny, I was on one.

CHARLOTTE

Oh, let the story die, Vera. It's done with. Simone's done the damn thing, you can't be the first anymore.

VERA

But I was!

FRANCES

When?! And where?!

SIMONE

He put his cock in me?

VERA

In the barn. When we went with father to visit the Smiths.

FRANCES

Oh, you cunt.

ELIZABETH

Language!

VERA

It was my cunt and his cock, innit.

FRANCES

You're a liar.

SIMONE

Cock is such an awful word. So round. *Cock*. It was not as round as it sounds. It was long and thin.

CHARLOTTE

Ignore her. She just wants attention, as per usual.

SIMONE

Like a few fingers.

(Beat.)

VERA

It did happen.

SIMONE

Was it fun?

VERA

It was very dirty.

SIMONE

Mm. That sounds right.

FRANCES

She's lying.

(VERA shoves FRANCES. A SCUFFLE begins.)

VERA

YOU-

FRANCES

BITCH-

VERA

MOTHER-

FRANCES

FATHER-

VERA

FUCK!

FRANCES

OW!

(SCUFFLE ends.)

FRANCES

She bit me.

VERA

You deserved it.

FRANCES

If any of it's true — which it isn't — you're a bloody *whore*.

(girls GASP)

At least Simone had the right mind to wait for her husband. But if you really did it, like you say you did, your dowry'll be worth nothing! No man will want to pay for damaged goods. You'll be married off to a peasant or have to work. Like Tabitha!

CHARLOTTE

Christ, Fran.

SIMONE

That's cruel.

ELIZABETH

You're not a whore, Vera. Don't let her get to you. We all know you didn't have his cock in you.

CHARLOTTE

What even is a cock? What does it look like?

SIMONE

Like a sausage.

CHARLOTTE

Sausage?!

ELIZABETH

Franny, are you going to apologize?

FRANCES

Only if she apologizes for lying.

VERA

You are the worst sister a girl could ever have.

FRANCES

Father's going to have to send you back to the priest.

VERA

(enraged)

I'm not going back to the priest.

FRANCES

Then mind yourself.

CHARLOTTE

We CAN'T go on like this! Simone is only here for the next few days and you two are going to ruin all our fun!

Frances, apologize.

FRANCES

I'm sorry.

CHARLOTTE

Vera?

VERA

Sorry.

ELIZABETH

Simone, I think you've ruined breakfast for me.

SIMONE

It's not that bad. Sausage tastes better.

FRANCES

What? Have you tasted his cock, then?

SIMONE

No. Is that even a thing?

Sounds horrific, it does.

FRANCES

I have no desire to marry.

SIMONE

It's not so bad. The house is very beautiful. And the bed is very big and soft. And the gardens are nice. I walk around them. There are many butterflies.

It's not so bad. And we can't scare Elizabeth off it.

CHARLOTTE

Oh! Oh! Right! There's a prince visiting /

ELIZABETH

Oh, bugger /

CHARLOTTE

Elizabeth — tell them about him.

ELIZABETH

What?

CHARLOTTE

Go on.

VERA

A prince of what?

SIMONE

North. South. East, maybe.

ELIZABETH

No. He's just a prince. Not of the North, South, or East.

SIMONE

What's his name?

ELIZABETH

It's not-

CHARLOTTE

Charles. As in the Charles that's next in line.

ELIZABETH

Charlotte-

CHARLOTTE

Come on! No one here is getting offered a hand any time soon, especially not me. You have to let me live vicariously through you. This is fun.

FRANCES

Have you seen your brother?

CHARLOTTE

In passing.

He might go to the front soon.

VERA

He'll be all right.

ELIZABETH

And I can talk to my father-

CHARLOTTE

I saw Charles out this morning.

ELIZABETH

Where?

CHARLOTTE

With the groundsman. Walking the hounds.

ELIZABETH

You didn't.

CHARLOTTE

I did.

ELIZABETH

Proof?

CHARLOTTE

How would I prove such a thing?

SIMONE

I saw him at dinner last night. He's very handsome.

VERA

Oh, very?

SIMONE

Very, Vera.

VERA

So very.

FRANCES

And he's to be king. Your father has needed to get on the king's good side for a long while now. It's honestly about time we get related.

VERA

And Elizabeth wants to get very related.

ELIZABETH

Oh, shut it!

VERA

Do you wish to see his cock, Your Highness?

ELIZABETH

Vera!

SIMONE

Do you want to marry him, Lizzy?

ELIZABETH

I barely know him!

SIMONE

I barely know my husband. Little difference it makes.

VERA

You don't have to know someone to have their cock in your cunt.

CHARLOTTE

I thought we were letting this die.

ELIZABETH

He's just a boy.

FRANCES

A prince is not a boy.

ELIZABETH

Then what is he?

FRANCES

He's the king's son.

ELIZABETH

Well, obviously-

SIMONE

Frances is right on this count. He's the king's son. He has power.

FRANCES

When am I not right?

ELIZABETH

I'm the king's daughter.

SIMONE

And he's a king's son. You're to be married. He's to be king.

CHARLOTTE

He could make you queen.

ELIZABETH

I could be queen here.

CHARLOTTE

Not with your seven brothers.

ELIZABETH

They could all die!

FRANCES

Your father won't send his male heirs to the front. Not all of them.

SIMONE

It's very likely you marry this Charles. It would solidify peace. It's all politics, marriage.

CHARLOTTE

And this is good politics.

SIMONE

And he's handsome. My Richard is nothing of the sort.

VERA

I don't think he's too bad.

FRANCES

You really are a whore.

(VERA throws something at Frances, but they both understand the tone is lighter now.)

ELIZABETH

I think you're all getting ahead of yourselves.

FRANCES

I don't think you're getting ahead enough.

VERA

You should try to get his head between your thighs.

SIMONE

Is that a thing?

CHARLOTTE

Just imagine, Elizabeth. It could be good fun.

VERA

It could be good cock.

SIMONE

Are they not all the same?

FRANCES

Not all horses have the same cocks.

SIMONE

Horses are not men.

VERA

If only.

CHARLOTTE

Vera!

VERA

Elizabeth, there is a handsome prince staying in the next wing. Any peasant's bitch would know how to behave in a moment like this.

ELIZABETH

I'm not-

VERA

You're not what? Not a beautiful princess, with a readily available hand? This could be the rest of your life.

CHARLOTTE

You could easily have twenty or so years with this man.

SIMONE

A beautiful man. My husband is ugly and has an ugly personality.

FRANCES

Good odds.

SIMONE

I bet beautiful men have better cocks.

ELIZABETH

Enough with the cocks!

VERA

We'll get you one, Your Highness. Do not fret.

ELIZABETH

I'm not fretting! You all are!

(Beat.)

CHARLOTTE

Just think about it.

FRANCES

Ugh, I dropped a stitch.

VERA

Serves you right.

(to SIMONE)

Do you think it'll hurt less next time?

SIMONE

Next time?

SCENE TWO: MEETING KING ARTHUR

Elizabeth's room. Day.

Elizabeth is on the bed, trying to read. Vera stands before the mirror. Frances and Charlotte are working the handheld loom. TABITHA moves in and out, muttering to herself.

ELIZABETH

Tuh- tuh- tee- teem... tee-mee...

Ugh, I give up.

CHARLOTTE

You only just started.

FRANCES

Careful, Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE

Sorry.

What are you doing that for anyway?

ELIZABETH

Apparently my father wants me to learn to read.

CHARLOTTE

My father says girls shouldn't be able to read.

VERA

Why's that?

CHARLOTTE

He said something about Satan and screwing. Or something else. I don't know. It makes stew of our brains or something.

FRANCES

Charlotte!

CHARLOTTE

Frances, it's not the end of the world if I drop a stitch.

FRANCES

Not the end of yours.

ELIZABETH

I've never known a girl to read.

VERA

Franny can.

CHARLOTTE

You can?

VERA

She used to read the tales of someone or other. Right Fran?

ELIZABETH

You can read?

FRANCES

I've dabbled, yes.

ELIZABETH

How did I not know this?

FRANCES

Well, I don't want Charlotte's father thinking my brain is stew. Or that I'm teaching his daughter witchcraft.

CHARLOTTE

Do you know witchcraft?

FRANCES

Witches aren't real, you imbecile.

VERA

Being a witch could be fun.

FRANCES

You're already a witch. A hag, even.

VERA

Oh, beloved sister. Green is not your color.

Doesn't this look good?

(She turns to the girls, having pushed up her boobs in her dress so that they look larger.)

ELIZABETH

Vera!

CHARLOTTE

You look indecent.

VERA

I think you mean "ravishing."

FRANCES

Enough with the whore act, Vera.

VERA

It's not my fault I have Mum's tits and you have Father's mustache.

FRANCES

I do not!

VERA

You do.

FRANCES

Do I, Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE

No, Frances.

(VERA gives her a pointed look as if to say, *she does*, and Charlotte shows reluctant agreement.)

FRANCES

Charlotte!

CHARLOTTE

You really don't. Truly.

(The girls settle.)

ELIZABETH

Frances, do you think if I gave you one of these books, you could read it?

FRANCES

Well, all right. Which?

ELIZABETH

You're the one who can read the names.

FRANCES

'Right.

(She looks.)

FRANCES (CONT.)

Hm. The... Death of... Arthur.

CHARLOTTE

My brother says that one's quite good. They read it out in the barracks.

FRANCES

It's about this... King Arthur.

ELIZABETH

Oh, I think he's the next kingdom over.

VERA

Hm. Is he gorgeous?

ELIZABETH

I don't know.

VERA

Why are you a princess if not to inform us of which royals are the most delectable?

CHARLOTTE

Vera is shopping for a husband.

VERA

We're all shopping for husbands. That's literally all we have to do.

CHARLOTTE

Franny reads.

VERA

Franny's Franny.

ELIZABETH

The duke was looking at you the other night.

VERA

He's *decrepit*. Probably tastes like feet. And old as bullocks.

CHARLOTTE

He's 23!

VERA

Yeah, that's halfway done, innit?

FRANCES

(idly, still consumed by book)

More than half.

VERA

See? Franny understands.

ELIZABETH

Franny's been eating your bullshit since she was born.

VERA

Bugger that. Are you going to dance with Charles tomorrow night?

CHARLOTTE

Ooh, good question.

ELIZABETH

These things aren't planned in advance, Vera.

VERA

Oh yes they are. The ball's been planned for a fortnight.

ELIZABETH

That's not what I meant.

VERA

I know what you meant, Lizzy. You're avoiding the question.

ELIZABETH

If he asks me, we'll dance.

CHARLOTTE

He must ask you. It'd be an offense to the king if he didn't.

ELIZABETH

See? None of this is even about me. It's all about my father.

VERA

That would change if you'd let me do your tits like I've done mine.

ELIZABETH

You know I can't well do that.

VERA

Why not? You're the princess. They can't make you a sinner.

ELIZABETH

Did the priest tell you that?

VERA

(genuinely enraged)

Shut up about the priest!

(trying to keep her cool)

Charles has been to France. I'm sure the girls there have tits up to their ears. You can't compare with those.

CHARLOTTE

Lizzy, don't let her rule you.

VERA

I'm not ruling her, I'm *advising* her. Like we're supposed to.

CHARLOTTE

We're supposed to sit quietly and mind ourselves.

VERA

If you think that's how this all works, I'll be praying for you, Lottie.

CHARLOTTE

Prayer means nothing if you're always on your knees.

(Pregnant beat.)

VERA

(removing herself from the situation)

Tabitha?

TABITHA

Hm?

VERA

Do you need any help with the mending?

ELIZABETH

You're no good—

TABITHA

If you're offering...

But you can't take—

VERA

I won't take a thing, Tabitha.

ELIZABETH

Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE

So she gets to dole out cruelties, but when I do it I'm a cunt?

ELIZABETH

She's sensitive.

CHARLOTTE

Cunts tend to be.

SCENE THREE: CHARLOTTE'S FIRST LETTER

Night. Charlotte, alone in the bedroom. The girls are at the ball.

She opens a letter that reads: Lottie, it's Kale. They are sending us southeast for the season. Everything will be all right. Take care without me. Remember the rules. With love, Your brother, Kale.

She cannot read it. Turns it around a few times. She stares at it, sadly, guessing the contents are not good.

SCENE FOUR: RECOUNTING THE BALL

The four girls are in Elizabeth's room, pretending to be at the ball. Charlotte plays Elizabeth. Elizabeth is Charles. Vera and Frances play other ladies.

The girls recreate the night for Charlotte, who wasn't there. Elizabeth bows to Charlotte. They dance, sweeping around the room, laughing.

Charlotte is delighted. Vera is happy the girls are happy.

Tabitha looks on from where she works in the corner, clearing out the chamber pot. She smiles to herself, then goes away.

The girls continue to dance. Vera takes Frances' hand and they dance, too.

There is no music.

SCENE FIVE: FRANCES HAS A SUITOR*Elizabeth's room. Elizabeth and Charlotte**are busying themselves.**Vera enters, flustered and in a rush.*

VERA

(out of breath)

Something has happened!

CHARLOTTE

(terrified)

The men? The war?

ELIZABETH

Is it Charles?

VERA

No, something important! And dire!

CHARLOTTE

Not the war? The boys?

ELIZABETH

Charles is to be king, that's important.

VERA

Oh, shut up, it's bigger than all that!

ELIZABETH

What's bigger than king?

CHARLOTTE

What's bigger than war?

Frances enters, redder than Vera. She holds a flower and a notecard.

(The girls squeal.)

CHARLOTTE

Oh Frances.

ELIZABETH

How could this be? Who is it?

FRANCES

The Lord of Waterbury.

(More squealing.)

CHARLOTTE

Oh Frances, this is great news!

ELIZABETH

Wow. You're to be married. You're the second one. To be married.

FRANCES

I'm not to be married.

VERA

Not yet.

FRANCES

Vera—

VERA

Oh, you fancy him, Franny. Look at your face!

FRANCES

I do not—

VERA

You like him!

CHARLOTTE

It's all right if you do, Fran.

FRANCES

I just never...

VERA

You intended to be stuck up here in Elizabeth's books forever. We know. You've preached about Guinevere enough. I would've chosen Arthur if it was me.

FRANCES

Guinevere and Lancelot are—

ELIZABETH

So you don't want to marry him?

FRANCES

I just met him, Lizzy.

ELIZABETH

So?

FRANCES

I don't know him.

ELIZABETH

Simone didn't know her husband.

FRANCES

Yeah, and she seems proper happy, does she?

CHARLOTTE

Frances, this is great news.

FRANCES

What does Lizzy think?

ELIZABETH

I don't think anything.

FRANCES

No, you never do. We think for you.

VERA

Fran, you must really fancy him if you're getting all—

FRANCES

Enough, Vera.

Lizzy, would you like to hear my note?

CHARLOTTE

It's all right if it's private—

FRANCES

He says I'm the prettiest girl in the castle.

ELIZABETH

(quickly)

Only because he doesn't have the funds to marry me.

FRANCES

Charles does. But he hasn't offered yet. Has he?

What has he done?

ELIZABETH

We're to take a turn soon.

FRANCES

Right. But no flowers or notes. One dance at the ball. As is proper. Just looks. Glances. Nothing special. Are you even sure they were glances, at you, not at something just over your shoulder?

CHARLOTTE

Frances—

FRANCES

What?

CHARLOTTE

You're being mean.

FRANCES

She's being mean.

VERA

I think you're both being mean.

FRANCES

Shut it, whore.

CHARLOTTE

FRANCES!

(Beat.)

FRANCES

I can be beautiful too, you know. I can be desired. A girl who can read is intelligent and above other women. I know better than any of you what goes on in this castle—

(The girls don't like that)

—and everyone's always so excited for Elizabeth. Why not for me? What about me is so repulsive to all of you that you thought this would never happen!

VERA

You said you didn't want it.

FRANCES

Well, of course I said that! Otherwise I'd be damn near tears all the time! What makes me any different? Is it the glasses? Do I really have Father's mustache?

CHARLOTTE

Frances...

VERA

I'm sorry we took you at your word. We didn't know you to be liar.

FRANCES

Well I try not to be like you.

VERA

Yes, and see how that's turned out. You're just as angry and mean as I've ever been. Elizabeth's close to tears.

ELIZABETH

(crying)

I am not!

FRANCES

(realizing)

Am I really that bad?

VERA

The sheer power of man.

(Long beat.)

FRANCES

Will they really make us like this?

VERA

They already have.

FRANCES

Oh God, I'm sorry, Lizzy.

ELIZABETH

It's okay.

FRANCES

No it's not.

ELIZABETH

It is.

FRANCES

It's not.

CHARLOTTE

LET'S JUST MOVE ON!

Frances, what'd he write?

FRANCES

I don't want—

VERA

He wants to go for a turn with her.

No different from Lizzy and Charles.

FRANCES

I'm sorry, I—

Tabitha enters. The girls censor themselves.

CHARLOTTE

Vera, none for you?

VERA

Never.

SCENE SIX: SIMONE VISITS

The girls are going about their business, having come in from a walk. SIMONE sits off to the side, hungrily eating something.

CHARLOTTE

So you walked together. That's something.

VERA

He's funnier than I thought he'd be.

FRANCES

You said he wasn't very funny at all.

VERA

He was quite funny.

FRANCES

So not very.

CHARLOTTE

I wish I could've been there.

Lizzy?

ELIZABETH

Hm?

CHARLOTTE

What did you think?

ELIZABETH

It was fine.

VERA

She was blushing like mad.

FRANCES

She fancies him.

CHARLOTTE

Oh, Elizabeth!

(Elizabeth sits, disgruntled.)

Oh, Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH

It's horrid.

CHARLOTTE

What is?

ELIZABETH

I think I really do fancy him. It was only a fantasy before, but... he's lovely.

VERA

There are worse things.

ELIZABETH

But what if he chooses some other lady?

FRANCES

Then he'll be long gone and another prince will come to replace him.

(Beat.)

But he'll choose you.

(Elizabeth is agonized.)

FRANCES

(to Simone and Charlotte)

What did you two get up to?

CHARLOTTE

Simone's been eating.

SIMONE

You say that like it's a bad thing.

CHARLOTTE

I say it like it's true.

VERA

Does your husband not feed you?

SIMONE

He does. When he remembers to. But it's not that. I've just been voracious as of late. No idea why.

FRANCES

You do look...

CHARLOTTE

Frances.

SIMONE

What?

FRANCES

What?

VERA

You know it's funny, Fran. You scorn us for talking about men, and then you go and call Simone / fat. The Duke has changed you.

SIMONE

Is she insinuating that I'm getting fat?

CHARLOTTE

Only the rich are fat, Simone. It's a privilege.

SIMONE

Am I getting fat?

CHARLOTTE

No.

FRANCES

A little.

SIMONE

Oh my God, I'm getting fat.

VERA

(quiet)

Don't take His name in vain.

CHARLOTTE

It's nothing, really—

SIMONE

I so am.

FRANCES

It's okay, Simone. That's what happens.

SIMONE

What do you mean that's what happens? I'm rotund!

(She picks up the front of her dress to reveal a bulging belly.)

CHARLOTTE

Well, that is... pretty significant.

ELIZABETH

(refocusing)

What?

Oh Lord, Simone.

(Vera mutters to herself.)

ELIZABETH

Really, how did you not notice?

SIMONE

I've been busy.

CHARLOTTE

With what?

SIMONE

Or- Organizing.

(Beat.)

Do you think it'll kill me?

CHARLOTTE

No.

SIMONE

God. What in...

FRANCES

It's probably just a baby.

(The girls turn to her, aghast.)

SIMONE

A baby? In there?

CHARLOTTE

Babies come in with the cows, Frances.

ELIZABETH

No, by stork.

VERA

They just appear places.

FRANCES

No, they don't.

VERA

And how would you know?

FRANCES

The same way you know about cocks, I suppose.

VERA

So you saw one, did you?

FRANCES

No, I read about it.

ELIZABETH

In the Arthur?

FRANCES

His mother slept with the king, but she didn't know it was the king, and then she was round. In the belly. Like Simone.

SIMONE

What?

CHARLOTTE

Slept with?

FRANCES

They laid together.

VERA

Oh.

ELIZABETH

I don't—

FRANCES

They had sex. Like Simone here.

SIMONE

(devastated, slowly devolves into hysterics)

Oh...

VERA

Did it get any better?

SIMONE

But I don't want to be a mother!

CHARLOTTE

Shhhh!

SIMONE

I cannot be a mother! My mother is rancid and agéd and the worst, frankly.

CHARLOTTE

Simone!

ELIZABETH

That can't be.

SIMONE

No, it's true.

(Beat.)

Do you think I'll become ugly now?

FRANCES

That's not how that works.

VERA

And you're the queen of knowledge?

FRANCES

Did you suddenly learn to read, Vera?

Thought not.

VERA

Cunt.

SIMONE

This is wretched!

CHARLOTTE

It's gonna be all right, Simone.

ELIZABETH

Lottie's right. We were all born and our mothers turned out okay.

CHARLOTTE

Um—

FRANCES

Charlotte's didn't.

SIMONE

Why not?

CHARLOTTE

I don't know.

SIMONE

Wait. If it's in me...

How does it get out?

(They all look to Frances.)

FRANCES

That I don't know.

SIMONE

Oh God!

VERA

Simone—

ELIZABETH

How will it get out?

CHARLOTTE

(horrified)

Do you think it's like the cows?

SCENE SEVEN: VERA VS FRANCES
DARKNESS.

ELIZABETH

I thought it might be bigger than that.

CHARLOTTE

It's plenty big, Elizabeth.

FRANCES

Isn't it gorgeous? It's just like the Arthur. I'm a real life Guinevere.

ELIZABETH

You said she ended up with Lancelot.

FRANCES

Oh, just look at it, Elizabeth.

LIGHTS UP. Elizabeth's bedroom.

*The girls, save Vera, study Frances' hand.
Tabitha works in the background.*

(They admire the ring.)

FRANCES (CONT.)

I'm going to be married.

CHARLOTTE

You'll be the second to go.

ELIZABETH

Oh my. I almost forgot about Simone.

CHARLOTTE

She was here last week.

ELIZABETH

Do you think she's had the baby?

CHARLOTTE

Only the Lord knows.

FRANCES

I never thought this would happen.

CHARLOTTE

Of course it happened, Franny. It was to be.

ELIZABETH

The wedding'll be beautiful.

FRANCES

I'm to be a wife.

Do you think I'll be different?

CHARLOTTE

As a wife?

Well, yes, of course.

FRANCES

I don't want to be too different.

CHARLOTTE

I think you'll have a say in that.

FRANCES

I don't know how much of a say Arthur had in any of it...

ELIZABETH

Which are you, Arthur, Guinevere, or Lancelot? Is this shag, marry, behead?
It's a good thing I can't read.

FRANCES

I'll be myself still.

CHARLOTTE

You'll always be yourself.

(Beat.)

FRANCES

I'm getting married.

Vera enters, slamming the door.

FRANCES (CONT.)

What is it now?

ELIZABETH

Vera?

CHARLOTTE

We're waiting.

(Vera puts out her hand.)

ELIZABETH

VERA!

CHARLOTTE

Christ!

VERA

Don't say that.

FRANCES

It can't be.

TABITHA

Stole your thunder, she did.

ELIZABETH

TABITHA, GET!

VERA

She's not a dog.

FRANCES

Who would even—

ELIZABETH

I'm in charge of her.

VERA

She's a human being like any of us!

ELIZABETH

I can do what I want!

FRANCES

I don't understand—

VERA

I'm sorry Charles hasn't wedded you yet but you can't be mad at me for getting proposed to!

ELIZABETH

I'm surprised, is all! Who even knew anyone was courting you?

VERA

It was quick!

ELIZABETH

Right!

VERA

Not all of us get the privilege of saying no!

FRANCES

But I'm to be married.

VERA

We can both be married. We can all be married.

CHARLOTTE

Can everyone be quiet?

(Tabitha hums to herself.)

ELIZABETH

TABITHA, GET!

VERA

LEAVE HER BE!

FRANCES

HOW COULD YOU?!

(BEAT.)

TABITHA

I don't mind. To the kitchens I go.

She exits.

VERA

What do you mean, how could I?

FRANCES

You get EVERYTHING! Every moment, you get everything! You can't even let Elizabeth order her own maid around without getting in the way!

This was supposed to be about me! It was supposed to be my moment! MY RING! MY MARRIAGE AND HUSBAND AND LIFE! Not yours!

VERA

...

ELIZABETH

...

CHARLOTTE

Don't you think that's a little harsh?

VERA

Let her say what she wants.

FRANCES

I can't believe you'd do this to me.

VERA

I don't have many options, Frances. And we're not to be married until after you.

FRANCES

Good, because I won't be coming back for yours.

CHARLOTTE

Don't say that!

FRANCES

Shove off—

CHARLOTTE

NO!

Not all of us get the privilege of having our siblings around all the time, and all you two do is squander it! You have your father and Elizabeth has her mother and father and brothers and sisters and my brother is likely never coming back and all you two do is fight about who gets to have a husband and who doesn't! Charles is going to propose, surely, because it'd be an offense if he didn't, and Vera is getting married because we all have to get married, and this is your moment Frances, no one is taking that away from you except you! You're the one ruining your own celebration by getting all up in arms about Vera! She didn't even say a thing about it! The man could be a rat and you're so entrenched in your own... jealousy that you can't let anything be!

Can't you just get along? Can't you be happy for her?

Aren't you happy, Vera?

VERA
(unconvincingly)

Yea.

CHARLOTTE

And aren't you happy for Frances?

VERA

I'm over the moon.

CHARLOTTE

Franny, why can't you share?

FRANCES

Because she shares nothing with me!
She's the pretty one, the funny one, the—

VERA

You're the brilliant one.

FRANCES

And that's all I get. You get everything else.

VERA

Your Duke loves you.

FRANCES

So he says.

VERA

Frances, I—

FRANCES

Christ, I just wanted—

VERA

You shouldn't / take the Lord's name in vain.

FRANCES

SHUT UP! JUST SHUT UP!

Did the priest teach you anything other than how to be a right CUNT?!

(A looooong silence. Very long. Devastatingly long.

Elizabeth and Charlotte have no idea what to say.)

VERA

He taught me to forgive. And I forgive you, Franny, even though you won't forgive me.

She exits.

CHARLOTTE

I can't believe you've done this.

Frances exits.

ELIZABETH

Will things ever be all right again, Lottie?

CHARLOTTE

What?

ELIZABETH

Everything's awful. Simone's gone, and Frances is going, and Vera too, and they're fighting and you're fighting them for fighting...

CHARLOTTE

Everything will be fine.

ELIZABETH

Will there be time for Frances to forgive Vera? Before she goes?

It's only a week more.

CHARLOTTE

Frankly, Lizzy, if she hasn't forgiven her yet, I don't know if she ever will.

ELIZABETH

Has Kale written?

CHARLOTTE

No.

ELIZABETH

I'm sure he's all right.

CHARLOTTE

I'm not.

ELIZABETH

I truly can ask my father—

CHARLOTTE

No, Lizzy. Just leave it be.
We need to just leave it all be.
It'll all work itself out.

ELIZABETH

Lottie—

CHARLOTTE

I love you, Lizzy.

ELIZABETH

I love you, Charlotte.

Charlotte exits.

SCENE EIGHT: TABITHA ALONE*Tabitha, centerstage. Elizabeth's bedroom.**Visibly uncomfortable. Her humor's dry.**Sewing or busying herself with some other task.*

TABITHA

Hello. I am Tabitha.

(pause; then, to someone offstage)

Vera, I really don't see the point of all this—

(as if reprimanded, turning back to the audience)

I am Tabitha of Longhan. I am five and twenty years of age and will be six and twenty when the first frost comes. I will have worked in King Erasmus' castle for... ten years, when the first frost comes. Yet again. I am assigned to Princess Elizabeth's chambers. I help her dress and bathe. I clean and feed her. She was a troublesome child when I first came along. The nursemaid had had enough of her. She up and left. Tired of the girl biting her tits off. I saw her topless once, in the baths. She was missing part of her nipple. I've never seen a thing like that. I was only five and ten then. The same age Elizabeth is now...

How did I end up here? Well, my mother bore me, a whore. My mother, not me. I wasn't born a whore. My mother might have been. I wasn't there for that. I was born a bastard. My mother was the whore. She used to say I was conceived down in Londontown. That's where she worked. She'd walk up and down the lanes at night, offering herself to whichever wanderer came by. She said she laid with more women than one might think. I don't like to think. But I do. She didn't know which man bore her down with me. She described the men fancifully; some were rich and running away from their wives, and others were beggars she couldn't feed with anything but her puss. I don't like to imagine my father. I doubt he was one of the rich ones. Look at me.

Actually, if he was one of the rich ones, he wouldn't want much to do with me at all. Not that any of the men would know that the whore they bedded bore me.

She moved here, north, for no reason, really. She would laugh and say, "I'd bedded all of London at that point — needed to move on, sow my oats elsewhere." And then I appeared. She knew she was pregnant soon enough. It's not like she ate enough to get fat. I was born a squalling, ugly, blue thing. The fact that I lived to breathe as many days I have remains a mystery, and, therefore, a miracle. That's why she named me after the Bible. Consider me Jesus and her Mary, although she was far from virginal. Perhaps Magdalene.

The syphilis caught up to her eventually. The seven demons had to get out somehow.

Anyhow. We used to live off this farm. Smith or something. We lived in the hay. With the cows. I knew what sex was before I could walk — I'd seen the horses climb atop each other. It was very violent. That's also how I learned what my mother was. She'd point and say, "That's what I used to do. It looked just like that. Eerie, innit, Abby?" She called me Abby because she said Tabby was a name for ugly girls. Hah.

And then I saw the horses give birth. It's disgusting. But they just get up and walk right after. They come out, and then they just go. I think about that sometimes — your heart beating in the darkness, the world pushing you and pushing you, and then there's light and you don't know a thing about anything but you're already running. You just go. Pity us fools, sitting around, talking all the time. So far from our own selves we can't do nothing until someone tells us how. The horses just are. They do. They live and they run and go.

I don't remember when it was we became regular people. I think I was a pretty child — the boys used to tug my hair and kiss my cheeks and whatnot. They'd pull my skirt and stockings, which were raggedy to begin with. My mother was not much of a seamstress. She tried to remember the old ways she'd been taught, but those weren't the kinds of pricks she was familiar with.

I didn't have much interest in the boys. They were ratty. And mean. I liked the horses. And the cows' big eyes. The pigs were fun too. I'd roll in the mud with them. Mother didn't stop me — she thought it was rather funny — but someone must've come along and told me it was not the thing to do. There were many things we did that were not the thing to do.

Mother kept whoring around. I think I tried my hand at it, but I wasn't very good. It wasn't fun. I don't even think Mother had fun. And then she died. Animals and people die just the same. The look in her eyes she got — same as the old cows. And no, I'm not going to joke about my mother being a cow, even if she was. Does that make me a heifer? Hah. I make myself laugh. There's not much else for me to do with my time. Gotta make myself laugh, or else I'll think about how much little lass shit I scrub at all the time. Think about the horses, think about the cows, think about Vera's jokes. She reminds me of Mother. Her humor. And she's pretty in the way Mother was. Mother was pretty. Not all whores are ugly. And not all princesses are pretty. Many are cows. And whores, too.

Sex does make me laugh. It's a rather silly idea, innit? Like the horses. You get naked and put things in each other. Yourself. You put yourself in another person. And you move around and sweat and make noises. It's a really noisy affair. It smells bad, too. It feels like God made it up so He could laugh down at us from on high. Here's how you'll continue on; oh, and it's a big joke, innit?

I came here after Mother died. I knew a girl in the kitchens and she brought me in. They put me in with the devil child. We used to play, the two of us. I don't think she remembers. At

some point, princesses grow old enough to recognize you're not a princess, no matter how many games of pretend you played, nor how well you played them. Now I just scrub at shit. Lass shit. Sometimes I'd rather it'd have been the horses. I'd rather be the horse. At least I still laugh. Hah.

SCENE NINE: DEATH COMES KNOCKING

FRANCES reads a letter. Spotlight on her alone.

FRANCES

Miss Charlotte Baker, I am Samuel. Your brother is a dear friend of mine. We trained and fought alongside each other — he was the first man to aid me in donning my armor. I spent many nights hearing him regale me with your letters, stories of the court and the games you are privileged enough to play as the princess' friend. I do not know if you know me; I expect you do not.

I know of you, and I knew your brother; for these reasons, I felt I must inform you that Kale died earlier today in battle. It was a valiant death for a courageous man — the best I have ever had the privilege of knowing.

I attach my address in case you would like to start a correspondence. Again, I expect nothing from you. With this horrific news, I send my condolences.

(dropping the letter)

And so on and so forth.

LIGHTS UP on the girls, stationed around the room. TABITHA cleans.

CHARLOTTE wears all black, sullen.

ELIZABETH

Oh, Charlotte.

FRANCES

It's just terrible.

TABITHA

Men die every day.

ELIZABETH

Tabitha! How dare you!

VERA

Leave her be.

FRANCES

Don't defend her — you haven't said a word about the letter.

VERA

I don't think Charlotte needs me to affirm that it's rather horrid — do you, Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE

No, / I don't.

ELIZABETH

She's in no place to be the center of you two's arguing. You've already had at it.
And Tabitha, begone.

TABITHA exits.

VERA

She's just a girl.

ELIZABETH

(Ignoring Vera)

I am truly the sorriest I have ever been. Oh, Lottie.

FRANCES

Is there anything we can do?

CHARLOTTE

Find me a husband.

ELIZABETH

What?

CHARLOTTE

I am without a father, a brother, a husband. I belong to no one and nothing. I have nothing of my own. I have nowhere to live-

ELIZABETH

You live here with me!

CHARLOTTE

I live here with you as long as my brother fights. He fights no longer.

(The girls take this in.)

ELIZABETH

That can't be the way.

VERA

It is the way.

ELIZABETH

You are so / horrid, the most horrid of girls I know.

CHARLOTTE

She's right, Lizzy.

ELIZABETH

Charlotte!

CHARLOTTE

Frances?

FRANCES

Oh, Charlotte-

ELIZABETH

This just can't be!

VERA

Not all of us are princesses. Some of us have to obey the laws of the land.

CHARLOTTE

Should I marry dear old Samuel? My brother did write that he was not the worst looking man on the front. Remember, Frances?

ELIZABETH

We can find you someone better. A lord, or- or a prince!

FRANCES

Perhaps we should leave this for another time.

VERA

What time? The girl is going to get the boot. You can marry the washman, or the young boy who works the stables.

FRANCES

He's twelve.

VERA

Then Charlotte will get a say in what kind of man he'll become.

I'm serious. We must find someone.

I'll go after Tabitha, see what she knows.

ELIZABETH

What will she know?

VERA

Everything.

She exits.

FRANCES

I wish I could be more helpful.

CHARLOTTE

No. I'm sorry to spoil your wedding preparations.

FRANCES

It's not going to be that large.

CHARLOTTE

But it will be your one and only wedding.

FRANCES

His second.

ELIZABETH

It's going to be beautiful.

FRANCES

I know.

CHARLOTTE

It will be.

FRANCES

Do you think there'll be a service for your brother?

CHARLOTTE

I hope so. I would like a place for him that I can visit. Beside my parents, maybe.

ELIZABETH

Everything is going to be all right.

CHARLOTTE

Vera'll find someone. I trust her. With this. Like she said, it's all we have to do.

SCENE TEN: A QUESTION IS BEGGED

Vera, in Elizabeth's room. Thoughtful.
Tabitha enters.

VERA

Tabitha?

TABITHA

Hm.

VERA

Do you think...

TABITHA

I'm not an imbecile.

VERA

Tabitha!

TABITHA

Vera!

VERA

I was asking a question.

TABITHA

Well, hop to it.

VERA

...

Do you think love is real? Like in the Arthur book Franny always talks about.

TABITHA

You give a girl a book and none of you will stop chattering on about it. I understand why they don't let us near the things. I'd be sick of me too.

...

Fine. To answer your question...

Yes.

VERA

You do?

TABITHA

Yes.

VERA

Why?

TABITHA

I've seen it.

Elizabeth enters.

VERA

Where?

TABITHA

You girls.

... Back to work.

Tabitha disappears.

ELIZABETH

What's she chattering on about?

VERA

Nothing important.

ELIZABETH

Never is. Supper?

VERA

Yes.

They exit.

SCENE ELEVEN: SLEEPOVER

ELIZABETH and VERA in Elizabeth's bed, alone. The ghosts of the other girls are felt. It's awkward.

ELIZABETH

What do we normally do?

VERA

Talk about men.

ELIZABETH

Really? Is that all?

VERA

Kind of. What else is there to talk about?

(They sit in silence.)

ELIZABETH

Do you miss Frances?

VERA

No.

ELIZABETH

Her wedding was beautiful. She seemed to be the most happy bride.

VERA

I know. Who would've thought old Fran with her knotty hair and stinky feet would end up skipping off with a Duke of wherever.

ELIZABETH

It's nice.

VERA

I suppose so. Though now there's no one to braid my hair before bed.

ELIZABETH

I could.

VERA

You wouldn't know how to braid if an ass stomped on your head.

ELIZABETH

Tabitha could.

VERA

Yes, but I don't want to be a bother.

ELIZABETH

It's not like she has anything better to do.

(Beat.)

VERA

I do miss her. Like I'm sure you miss Charlotte.

ELIZABETH

We all miss Charlotte.

VERA

I could go without.

ELIZABETH

Liar. You found her a husband.

VERA

He's a nobody.

ELIZABETH

He seemed sweet.

VERA

He was very sweet.

I learned of him through the Smith boy. They're cousins.

ELIZABETH

Was it strange, talking to the Smith boy?

VERA

No. There are much worse men about.

The Smith boy was very gentle.

ELIZABETH

Did you really have sex with him?

VERA

What do you think?

ELIZABETH

I don't know.

Nothing makes sense anymore.

VERA

That's just growing up, Lizzy.

ELIZABETH

You're ten months older than me.

VERA

And every month counts.

(Beat.)

ELIZABETH

All right, let's talk about Charles.

VERA

You said you didn't want to.

ELIZABETH

I changed my mind.
Do you really think he's going to?

VERA

He simply must.

ELIZABETH

I can't believe it.

VERA

Do.

ELIZABETH

And it'll happen in the garden?

VERA

Yes.

ELIZABETH

What if he does it by where the dogs piss?

VERA

He won't.

ELIZABETH

He might.

VERA

I told him your favorite spot, Lizzy. He's going to do it there.

ELIZABETH

And how does it happen?

VERA

I don't know how it'll happen!

ELIZABETH

But you've done it! Tell me, Vera!

VERA

Fine.

He'll look at you, and take your hand, and get down on one knee, and you'll look down at him as he does it, and even though you knew it would happen it'll still be strange — you'll want to say "Get up, you fool, you'll dirty your trousers" — and he'll ask.

ELIZABETH

Is it beautiful?

VERA

Yours will be.

ELIZABETH

Yours wasn't?

VERA

...Mine was.

ELIZABETH

In three days, you'll be gone too.

VERA

It's not the war.

ELIZABETH

No. But you'll be a wife.

I'll be here.

VERA

You'll be next.

ELIZABETH

Franny's coming back for it, right?

VERA

To her dismay.

ELIZABETH

She wants to come.

VERA

I think she's taken to the married life. Perhaps all she needed was a cock in her. She'll never read again, too busy riding.

ELIZABETH

She'll read.

And she'll be here.

VERA

Right.

She's just... different. Than I knew her to be.

ELIZABETH
(mimicking her)

Well, that's just growing up, Lizzy.

VERA

Yea. It is.

ELIZABETH

She'll always be your little girl that loved watching the toads in the moat.

VERA

No, she won't. She wasn't anymore. And that's all right.

She was a beautiful bride.

(getting up, shifting the mood)

And you will be even more beautiful.

ELIZABETH

Vera...

VERA

Your wedding is going to be gorgeous. It'll be like the garden, but prettier. And he'll kiss you under the blooms, and then he'll bed you and it'll also be glorious—

ELIZABETH

Vera!

VERA

(continuing on)

—and you'll have mountains of children, all with his eyes and your smile, and you'll be queen. You'll be the prettiest, most commanding queen, and the other kingdoms will fear your bad side, not his, because it was never about him, and you'll be famous. You'll be the star of the English court as long as you're alive, and after, too. And you'll wake up every morning in the bed of the man you love, and he'll kiss your eyelids and hold you like you're the sweetest confection in the world. The sun will shine like pure gold on the two of you. Every day, gold. You'll never know trouble. All you'll know is how it feels to be touched by someone that loves you, and thinks you're the most precious thing in the world, and he will never make you cry or even make you frown. You'll never doubt him, either. He will be the solid sky against which you glow.

(Long beat.)

ELIZABETH

And what about you?

VERA

(breaking out of it)

How do you mean?

Where do I figure in to your story?

ELIZABETH

No. What about your life? With your husband?

VERA

I haven't thought about mine.

ELIZABETH

Whyever not?

VERA

(I don't want to jinx it.)

I don't want to blast any stars.

SCENE TWELVE: THE TEST

*FRANCES and ELIZABETH are in
Elizabeth's Room, talking and waiting.*

ELIZABETH

She should be back any minute now...

Are you worried?

FRANCES

No.

ELIZABETH

(continues without hearing)

I'm not worried, but I thought you might be. Given she's your sister and all. Just what could be taking so long, you know?

FRANCES

I'm sure she's fine.

ELIZABETH

Mm. Of course.

It's just been a while...

FRANCES

I wouldn't worry. This is Vera we're talking about. And the test is simple. Simone passed, I passed, Charlotte passed.

It's a good thing Vera's even getting married. I thought she never would.

ELIZABETH

Don't say that.

FRANCES

Why not? He's paying her dowry in two day's time. The thing's practically done with. I didn't think I should've come back at all. It's just a formality.

ELIZABETH

Right. Formalities.

FRANCES

All these little things we do in the name of propriety.

Suddenly, VERA enters, ashen.

FRANCES

Vera.

ELIZABETH

Did something happen?

(VERA collapses onto the bed, emotional.)

ELIZABETH

Vera?

FRANCES

Come off it now, tell us what you've done.

VERA

(muffled)

I haven't done anything!

FRANCES

If you haven't done anything, then why are you making a fuss?

ELIZABETH

What happened, Vera?

VERA

I'm no good.

ELIZABETH

What?

VERA

They checked me.

ELIZABETH

For what?

FRANCES

Her vagina, Lizzy.

ELIZABETH

Why?

FRANCES

To see if she's... spoiled.

ELIZABETH

That's what this is? I thought it was just... a formality. I thought they made you walk a line or balance books on your head.

FRANCES

So it's true, then. You're not a virgin.

VERA

No.

FRANCES

I thought you were lying.

VERA

I didn't mean to not be a virgin. You don't get to choose these things.

ELIZABETH

Things?

VERA

What you are. You don't choose it. It happens to you.

ELIZABETH

What happened to you?

(LOOOOOOOOOOOONG BEAT.)

ELIZABETH

Vera. What happened to you?

FRANCES

The Smith boy. Like you said.

VERA

No, I did that one on my own.

ELIZABETH

I'm pretty sure it requires two.

FRANCES

If not the Smith boy, then...

The priest. Wasn't it?

VERA

Yes.

I didn't want him to... I didn't not want him to.

He just did.

ELIZABETH

When was this?

VERA

The summer...

FRANCES

She was sent to the nuns two summers ago. She wouldn't eat after Mother died. Father thought God needed to intervene.

ELIZABETH

There was a priest at the nunnery?

VERA

The nuns didn't want me for the whole three months. I lived in a nearby village for two.

FRANCES

I didn't know that. I thought you were only with the priest for a few days.

VERA

You don't know much, Frances.

LIGHTS GO DOWN, SPOTLIGHT on VERA. The girls disappear, leaving her alone onstage.

VERA

I lived in a small cottage with two other women working in the name of the lord. One was a proper nun — the other was a girl a wee bit younger than I, with gorgeous blonde hair and the sweetest freckled face you ever did see. Her name was Meintrude. We called her Trudy. There were two beds. Sister Christina took the small cot. Trudy and I shared the bigger bed.

None of this is important.

Trudy and Sister Christina often worked directly with the hungry. The Sister spoke to the peasants while Trudy handed out Saints' bones. I worked directly with the Father. I carted the communion bread and wine, flipped the pages for his sermons. He was a beautiful orator. When he spoke...

I don't know if he was handsome. I can no longer conjure him in my mind's eye. The first time he touched me, two fingers on my shoulder, I went scarlet. He laughed at my naïveté. Didn't I know what the Sisters got up to in their spare time? I'd been there two weeks. Had I not heard their cries in the night?

I hadn't. I sleep like a dog.

He took to telling me of his escapades while we worked. We would pick up the bread from the baker, and he would tell me of the girl in the woods. Slicing the bread; the duke's young wife. Pouring the wine; "her cunt on my tongue." Every night, I slept with Trudy curled against me, and I studied her. How did a holy young woman sleep? I no longer knew. I ran my fingers through her wheat-like hair and imagined soaking her innocence up through my skin. And then I was next to the priest and handing him water through the confessional. Everything was lit by candles. Shadows danced among us.

This went on for weeks. There were so many stories. I saw his... cock... in my dreams. It was that familiar.

Towards the end of my stay, he said he thought I was ready to read. He sat me down with the Bible. Before there was light, there was his hand under my dress.

...

His voice is like cold water over your hands in the summer. He's the closest thing I've ever known to God. He speaks for God. You want the relief of doing what he says. You want his love.

He looked nothing like I thought it would. It was red and bulging and ugly. It was angry. It hurt. He never said anything about that.

I wanted it to end. I wanted him to stop.

...

How do you say no to God?

Vera stands for a while.

Frances appears at the edge of the stage, hand out. Vera turns, walks to her, and takes it.

They exit together.

SCENE THIRTEEN: ELIZABETH'S TURN

Elizabeth, in her room, waiting. She wanders around the space, touching things and smiling sadly at the associated memories. She gets increasingly agitated.

Tabitha enters.

TABITHA

They're ready for you now.

Come along, then. You are a virgin, aren't you?

(Elizabeth stands, hesitantly.
Before she reaches the door—)

ELIZABETH

Tabitha, I'm having second thou—

(Tabitha SLAPS Elizabeth across the face.)

TABITHA

There was a time when I loved you like a sister. Then you grew into a sour thing and treated me as a beast. I am no one's bitch, especially not yours. You will go into this room, they will ensure you are untouched, which you are, because I have done my job, and tomorrow you will marry the prince and you will be out of my hair. Thank the Lord and all his animals.

(Beat)

Serve well, Queen Elizabeth.

Tabitha turns and exits. After a moment, a stunned Elizabeth follows.

SCENE FOURTEEN: GOODBYE, EVERYBODY

A ballroom.

ELIZABETH, center. SIMONE, pregnant again, with a servant carrying her sleeping firstborn.

ELIZABETH

Simone! It's lovely to see you.

SIMONE

Oh Lizzy, how are you? What are you doing back here, already?

ELIZABETH

I'm well. Visiting my father. Agreements and other royal things, I suppose. How are you? Pregnant as ever, once again.

SIMONE

Yes, yes. Don't mind it. I barely remember I've got it until I need to use the loo. But you, you're married now, aren't you? Due to be the Queen.

ELIZABETH

Yes.

SIMONE

How is that?

ELIZABETH

It's nice.

SIMONE

Nice? That's all you have to say for it?

ELIZABETH

Well—

*SMALL COMMOTION as a servant enters:
VERA, newly demoted.
ELIZABETH and SIMONE watch.*

SIMONE

Dear Vera.

What mistakes we women make.

ELIZABETH

I wouldn't say—

SIMONE

And good riddance to Tabitha. She needed to be done away with. I didn't think it until I heard about her and the axe, but you are fit to be Queen. Tabitha proved that.

ELIZABETH

I don't know if- I didn't mean / for her to die—

SIMONE

/ What? She was a rancid, trifling thing. I never liked her. And how ugly she was... bleugh. At least you can stand to look at Vera.

Where were we? Your marriage.

ELIZABETH

(totally uncomfortable)

The coronation is in a few months.

SIMONE

Christ, Lizzy. Little girl to big fat Queen. I still can't imagine you tall enough to climb onto the throne.

ELIZABETH

Times change.

SIMONE

Indeed. You're Queen, Vera's a whore, Franny's a wife, Tabitha's dead...

Whatever happened to that other girl? The poor one?

ELIZABETH

Do you mean Charlotte?

SIMONE

Yes! Her!

ELIZABETH

She married a farmer.

SIMONE

A farmer? Really?

I suppose that follows.

Well, if that's all, the baby and I / need feeding.

ELIZABETH

(realizing)

Simone?

SIMONE

Hm?

ELIZABETH

Do you remember one of the last times we were all together, and you told us about your wedding night?

SIMONE

Of course I do. God, it feels like ages ago.

ELIZABETH

It was only last year. Thirteen months, maybe.

SIMONE

Children change you. *Marriage* changes you. You'd know.

ELIZABETH

...Right. Well... I was wondering...
Does it get better?

SIMONE

What?

ELIZABETH

You know.

SIMONE

Are you talking about sex, Lizzy?

ELIZABETH

Yes—

SIMONE

It's not a bad word.

ELIZABETH

Right then. Sex. Does it get better?

SIMONE

I suppose. Gets easier. Less painful. More regular. Except when it's different, which sometimes you can tell ahead of time, and sometimes you can't. If it'll be different, that is.

ELIZABETH

Do you like it more?

SIMONE

Like it more?

ELIZABETH

Do you want it more?

SIMONE

You aren't a stranger to sexual urges, are you, Lizzy?

ELIZABETH

No, that's not what I mean.

SIMONE

What do you mean?

ELIZABETH

Does it get better? When it happens, do you want it to happen? Do you want it, really, truly want it, and not feel like you need to because your husband's trying to stick it in you?

I want to know that I have something to look forward to.

SIMONE

I don't know if that matters.

I have to go.

It was nice seeing you, Lizzy.

ELIZABETH

Thank you. Same to you.

SIMONE

Good luck with the crown.

SIMONE exits.

VERA labors.

ELIZABETH considers everything, horror dawning.

END OF PLAY.